

MY VOICE[©]

NEW HAMPSHIRE GRADES 3-5 RESULTS 2007-2008 ACADEMIC YEAR

Supported by
New Hampshire Department of Education's
Follow the Child Initiative

Processed by Aspirations Unlimited



29 Falmouth Street ♦ Portland, Maine ♦ 04103
www.qisa.org

MY VOICE© NEW HAMPSHIRE GRADES 3-5 RESULTS: THE FIRST STEP IN THE *FOLLOW THE CHILD* INITIATIVE

The New Hampshire Department of Education, under the leadership of Commissioner Lyonel B. Tracy, is dedicated to providing a personalized education that helps New Hampshire students learn today, graduate tomorrow, and prepare for the future by supporting their personal, social, physical and academic growth. As a result of its commitment to put New Hampshire students at the front and center of its educational system, the New Hampshire Department of Education offered the My Voice© survey free of charge to all schools that wished to participate.

The Role of Student Aspirations in Today's Schools

When students have high aspirations, *they have the ability to dream about the future, while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams.* Whether the goal is to learn Algebra or a trade, get good grades or go to college, students want to be successful. Too often, however, students don't reach their goals and fullest potential because the conditions that inspire and support them are not in place. If students are to enjoy academic, social, and personal success, they must believe in themselves, be actively engaged in their learning, and see the connection between what they learn today and who they want to become tomorrow. When these experiences are absent, aspirations flounder and achievement declines.

In order for students to have and sustain high aspirations, the conditions that enable them to reach their goals must be in place. These conditions are known as the **8 Conditions that Make a Difference®** and are a critical, often overlooked, part of education and school improvement initiatives. The 8 Conditions have been identified and defined by Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, an internationally known leader in the study of student aspirations. The 8 Conditions are: *Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action.* In order to measure these conditions in today's schools, the *My Voice©* Student Aspirations Survey was developed.

New Hampshire's *Follow the Child* Initiative

Follow the Child helps New Hampshire schools to foster student aspirations and promote student success through an emphasis on personalized learning and assessment. The first step in this process is for schools to gain insight into whether students perceive their schools as places in which they are known, supported, challenged, and inspired.

The *My Voice©* Student Aspirations Survey Grades 3-5

The *My Voice©* Student Aspirations Survey Grades 3-5 assesses student aspirations by asking students to respond to 51 statements about the 8 Conditions, as well as demographic questions. The statements probe the conditions that affect students' aspirations and, ultimately, their personal, social, physical, and academic development. Students respond to the 8 Conditions statements on a 3-point Likert scale with possible responses being "Yes," "No" and "Sometimes." The categories were chosen to be age appropriate and help young students respond to survey statements.

By asking students how *they* perceive their school environment, *My Voice*© provides educators with a powerful tool for understanding both what motivates and inspires students to achieve, and how well students believe their school is meeting those objectives. *My Voice*© is a critical motivator for initiating innovative, meaningful school reform.

My Voice© New Hampshire Grades 3-5 Report: Demographics for Academic Year 2007-2008

A total of 21,761 New Hampshire students in Grades 3-5 completed the *My Voice*© survey. One hundred fifty-six (156) schools of various sizes and socioeconomic backgrounds were represented. Fifty-one percent (51%) of the students surveyed were male; 49% percent were female. Thirty-three percent (33%) of students were in grade 3; 35% were in grade 4; and 32% were in grade 5.

My Voice© New Hampshire Grades 3-5 Report for Academic Year 2007-2008

The *My Voice*© New Hampshire Grades 3-5 Report is organized around the 8 Conditions. In each section, the condition is defined and data on the survey statements about that condition are described. The results are discussed in relation to key aspects of the condition. A brief conclusion and directions for further analysis are included at the end of the report.

Condition 1: Belonging

The Condition of Belonging means that a student is a valued member of a community, while still maintaining his or her uniqueness. It is a relationship between two or more persons characterized by a sense of connection and support. Belonging is a necessary condition for students' well-being, social engagement, and competence. The condition of Belonging increases intrinsic motivation, for it fosters self-confidence and investment in the community.

Students' Perceptions of *Belonging*

There are two key aspects to the condition of Belonging in schools. First, students must perceive school as a community where they feel connected, safe, and supported. Seventy-one percent (71%) of the students surveyed said "Yes" to the statement "I like my school." Eighty-four percent (84%) said they have friends they can be with at lunch. When asked how other students treat them, 75% said "Yes" to the statement "Other students like me." However, just 52% said other students are kind to them. Forty-nine percent (49%) of students surveyed said bullying is a problem at their school. More third graders (61%) than fifth graders (37%) said "Yes" to this statement.

The second key aspect of the condition of Belonging is that students feel valued for who they are as individuals. Of the students surveyed, 72% said the principal knows their name. In response to the statement "I feel important in my classroom," 17% of the students answered "No."

Discussion

Of the students who responded to the *My Voice*© survey, the majority report they like their school, the principal knows who they are, and other students like them. While these findings are positive, the percentages could—and should—be higher. The fact that between 20% and 30% of the students did not answer “Yes” to questions about Belonging means there is work to be done in supporting this condition.

Additional concerns are that only half of the students surveyed say other students are kind to them and the same percentage say bullying is a problem in their school. This means half of the students do not experience school as a place that is always safe and supportive. In addition, close to one-fifth of students in grades 3-5 do not feel important in their classroom. For the condition of Belonging to thrive, students must feel connected, valued, and safe in their school. These findings suggest there is significant work to do in this area. The fact that three-quarters of the students say other students like them, but just half say other students are nice to them, suggests another area in need of exploration.

Condition 2: Heroes

Heroes are the everyday people—teachers, friends, family—in students’ lives who inspire them to excel and to make positive changes in attitudes and lifestyles. Heroes are people students can connect with, those who have a positive influence on them, and who listen to and value their ideas. Heroes build trust in others and belief in oneself. Educators are by definition Heroes to their students who look up to teachers and school leaders as people to learn from and communicate with about many things. Building relationships with students through support, guidance, and encouragement enables them to become more confident in their academic, personal, and social growth.

Students’ Perceptions of Heroes

The condition of Heroes emphasizes the critical ways teachers believe in, support and inspire students. In response to *My Voice*© questions about this condition, the majority of students said “Yes” to the following statements: “My teacher cares about me” (87%); Teachers care if I am absent from school (65%); and “If I have a problem, I have an adult at school I can talk to” (70%). Fourteen percent (14%) said “No” to the statement “If I am upset, I can tell my teacher why.”

The condition of Heroes is also about respect, not just between teachers and students, but students and one another. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of students said students respect teachers and 86% said teachers respect students. Students’ relationships with each other are also important to this condition; however, just 53% of students surveyed reported students respect each other; more third graders (64%) than fifth graders (42%) answered “Yes” to this statement. Supporting these findings, only 54% of students surveyed said students help each other at school.

Discussion

The data reveals that most of the students surveyed have a positive connection with a teacher or other adult at their school. They feel teachers care about them and that they have someone they can talk to. A small percentage stated that, if they feel upset, they

cannot tell their teacher why, pointing to a continued need to develop strong, communicative relationships between teachers and students.

Supporting the findings that students in grades 3-5 have positive adult role models, close to nine out of ten said teachers respect students, though fewer students said students respect teachers. Students can also be heroes to one another, yet the data show there are less positive relationships among peers. For a true culture of respect to exist in schools, students must be encouraged to develop more positive relationships with one another.

Condition 3: Sense of Accomplishment

The Condition of Sense of Accomplishment recognizes effort, perseverance, and citizenship—along with academic achievement—as signs of student success. Educators have traditionally used a narrow view of accomplishment as it refers to innate ability, grades, or who is “best in the class.” The Condition of Sense of Accomplishment, however, views success in terms of personal growth and effort, not just class rank and test scores. Schools can celebrate their students’ accomplishments in visible ways. Taking time to recognize and support students’ efforts will result in students who are motivated to persevere through difficult tasks and to create a healthy learning environment through hard work and dedication.

Students’ Perceptions of Sense of Accomplishment

When asked questions about traditional forms of academic accomplishment, 93% of students surveyed said “Yes” to the statement “Getting good grades is important to me.” When asked questions about their effort and perseverance 5% of students surveyed said they give up when schoolwork is difficult; eighty-seven percent (87%) stated they give their best effort at school. Sixty-six percent (66%) of students surveyed said teachers recognize them when they try their best.

When asked about whether accomplishments are recognized or citizenship is celebrated in their school, 40% of the students said their teacher hangs up their work in the classroom or hallway. Sixty-four percent (64%) of students said teachers recognize them when they are kind and helpful, and 70% said they help other people at their school.

Discussion

Overall, the Sense of Accomplishment findings are positive. High percentages of students say they try hard in school and very few students say they give up when work is difficult. Questions about good citizenship also yielded relatively positive results. As with the other conditions, however, even the most positive findings have room for improvement, as evident in the fact that just two out of three students say their teacher recognizes them when they try their best.

The weakest finding in this condition is that just two out of five students said their work is displayed in the classroom or school. Educators must ask themselves what it means to young learners to have their school work recognized and celebrated, and must consider how to increase such recognition for all students.

Condition 4: Fun & Excitement

The condition of Fun & Excitement is characterized by students being inspired to learn. They are actively engaged and emotionally involved in their school work. Students who exhibit Fun & Excitement are self-confident, curious, and prepared; they are willing to meet the challenges of the day. To foster this condition in schools, students need to be offered new opportunities, as well as meaningful challenges, that are connected with their individual interests.

Students' Perceptions of Fun & Excitement

Fun & Excitement is first and foremost about students being engaged in their learning consistently. To be actively engaged in learning students must find it enjoyable and worthwhile. Forty-seven percent (47%) of students surveyed said they like going to school; more third graders (55%) than fifth graders (39%) answered "Yes" to this statement and more girls (53%) than boys (41%) said "Yes" as well. Twelve percent (12%) said "Yes" to the statement "School is boring," and 79% said "Yes" to the statement "I learn things in many different ways."

Of the students surveyed, 54% agreed with the statement "Learning can be fun." Fifty-five percent (55%) said "Yes" to the statement "I have fun at school," though fewer third graders (62%) than fifth graders (46%) agreed with this statement. Fifty-five percent (55%) of students said "Yes" to the statement "Teachers have fun at school."

Discussion

The findings for Fun & Excitement hover around the fifty percent mark, suggesting that approximately half of the students surveyed experience this condition in their learning. While educators express grave concern about the lack of engagement seen in high school students, these findings suggest that even at the elementary level only one out of two students associate learning with fun. The finding that one tenth of students said school is boring is also worrisome. How can schools actively engage all students?

The fact that as students move from third to fifth grade fewer say "Yes" to the statements is of even greater concern because it means the number of students who experience the condition of Fun & Excitement actually decreases as students move through the grades. How can schools reverse this trend and increase, rather than decrease, student engagement in learning?

Condition 5: Curiosity & Creativity

The condition of Curiosity & Creativity is characterized by inquisitiveness, eagerness, a strong desire to learn new or interesting things, and a longing to satisfy the mind with new discoveries. Curiosity triggers students to ask "Why?" while creativity gives them the initiative to ask "Why Not?" The intensity of Curiosity & Creativity tends to diminish over time due to the habituating effects of the environment. Therefore, to sustain student motivation, schools must pay careful attention to creating learning environments that promote questioning and creative exploration.

Students' Perceptions of Curiosity & Creativity

The condition of Curiosity & Creativity encourages students to experience the joy of exploring new ideas. When asked about their current learning, 53% of students surveyed said they like what they learn in school, though fewer fifth graders (44%) than third graders (61%) agreed. Seventy-five percent (75%) of students said they like to learn new things in their classroom.

To foster Curiosity & Creativity, classrooms must encourage student inquisitiveness and demonstrate the relevance of studying new material. Questions about Curiosity & Creativity in the classroom yielded mixed results. Sixty percent (60%) of students answered "Yes" to the statement "I feel comfortable asking questions in class"; 66% said "Yes" to the statement "My teacher listens to my ideas"; and 22% answered "No" when asked if their teacher knows what they like to do.

Discussion

While three-fourths of students in grades 3-5 say they like to learn new things, just half say they like what they learn in school. The discrepancy between these two findings means the potential schools have to ignite student interest in learning is not being fulfilled. The fact that fewer fifth graders than third graders say they like what they learn in school supports the trend seen in other conditions: the longer students are in school, the less they are engaged in their learning.

Curiosity & Creativity is also about asking "Why?" and "Why not?" questions. However, just three out of five students said "Yes" to the statement "I feel comfortable asking questions in class" and only slightly more said their teacher listens to their ideas. If students do not feel like they can explore new ideas or contribute their own, they will be less likely to stay interested in their lessons. One way to help students relate their learning to the world around them is to tie learning to student interests. Yet one-fifth of student surveyed said teachers don't know the things they like to do. This is another area educators can look at for potential change.

Condition 6: Spirit of Adventure

The condition of Spirit of Adventure is characterized by students' ability to take on positive, healthy challenges at school and home, with family and friends. Students experience the Spirit of Adventure when they tackle something new without the fear of failure or success. When schools promote healthy decision making and healthy risk taking, their students become more confident and resilient. Students with the Spirit of Adventure see life as full of opportunities worth exploring for their own sake.

Students' Perceptions of Spirit of Adventure

The condition of Spirit of Adventure is about students trying new things. It is about students moving from their comfort zone to their challenge zone. Students face two common obstacles when they do so: the fear of success and the fear of failure. While 96% of students surveyed said they want to do well in school, 50% said they only raise their hand if they are sure of the answer. Twenty-two percent (22%) of students answered "No" to the statement "I am excited to tell my friends when I get good grades."

Another key aspect of Spirit of Adventure is whether students feel supported when they want to try new things. Eighty-two percent (82%) of students surveyed said their teacher helps them learn from their mistakes, and 76% said their teacher thinks they are smart.

Discussion

Whether students have the courage to move beyond their comfort zone into their challenge zone depends on overcoming fear and anxiety. As the data shows, despite the fact that virtually all students surveyed say they want to do well in school, half of them are willing to participate in class only if they know the answer. If students are afraid to challenge themselves they will not learn and grow as individuals. It must be as safe for students to have a Spirit of Adventure and *not* succeed as it is for them *to* succeed when they take a healthy risk.

The most positive findings in this condition involve the support students feel from their teachers. Connecting back to the strong findings in the condition of Heroes, this data underscores the strong relationships most of the students in grades 3-5 have with teachers. The positive support of teachers encourages students to challenge themselves to take the next step toward their goals. Teachers must continue to express their belief in who their students are, and who they can become.

Condition 7: Leadership & Responsibility

The condition of Leadership & Responsibility means students are able to express their ideas and are willing to accept consequences for their actions. It cultivates accountability for the classroom environment and school community. Schools which promote this condition teach and expect their students to be good decision makers. They provide legitimate decision-making opportunities, seek student input, and expect students to be accountable for their actions and words. Students are trusted to make the right decisions and are recognized for doing so.

Students' Perceptions of Leadership & Responsibility

The condition of Leadership & Responsibility is twofold: students must develop strong decision-making skills and have real leadership opportunities. Only then can they be truly responsible leaders who make a difference in their communities. Forty-six percent (46%) of students surveyed answered "Yes" when asked if they are good decision makers. Ninety-five percent (95%) said it is important to follow rules.

When asked about leadership in their school communities, just 55% of the students said they can make choices in their classroom; 42% answered "No" to the statement "My teacher lets me be in charge of things," though more third graders (20%) than fifth graders (12%) said "Yes" to this statement. When asked questions about themselves as leaders, 34% of students surveyed said "Yes" to the statement "I see myself as a leader." A similar number (31%) said "Yes" to the statement "Other students listen to my ideas."

Discussion

Only one-third of students in grades 3-5 see themselves as leaders; a similar number say other students listen to their ideas. Both findings reflect young learners' developing sense of their leadership ability. To foster the condition of Leadership & Responsibility, students must have real leadership opportunities but the percentage of students who say they can make choices in their classroom or are good decision makers is approximately half. The percentage plummets when students are asked if teachers let them be in charge of things.

Although young students seem to have few opportunities to be leaders and make choices, many of them believe it is important to follow rules suggesting they have a solid foundation for developing these skills. Schools must find ways to cultivate this potential and foster this condition so all students learn to make good decisions and become accountable for their actions.

Condition 8: Confidence to Take Action

Confidence to Take Action is the extent to which students believe in themselves. It encourages them to dream about their future while being motivated to set goals in the present. This condition is what educators strive for; all other conditions must be established and supported for students to attain this level of aspiration. Confidence to Take Action is characterized by a positive and healthy outlook on life and by looking inward rather than outward for approval. Schools can help build their students' Confidence to Take Action by providing support, celebrating diversity, and encouraging independent thinking.

Students' Perceptions of Confidence to Take Action

The condition of Confidence to Take Action is the pinnacle of the 8 Condition framework and also the goal of all educational ventures: to provide students with enough belief in themselves that they can set goals for the future and take steps in the present to reach those goals. When asked questions about goal-setting, 74% of students surveyed said "Yes" to the statement "I know how to set goals for myself" and 69% said their teacher helps them reach their goals. Sixty-nine percent (69%) said "Yes" to the statement "I think I am smart" and 89% said they work hard in school. When asked about the connection between school and their future, 84% of students surveyed said "Yes" to the statement "I want to go to college."

Discussion

There is a difference between dreaming about the future and taking the steps needed to reach those dreams. The condition of Confidence to Take Action is defined by the successful integration of these two processes. While the majority of students surveyed said they work hard in school and believe they are smart, almost a quarter do not know how to set goals. Even fewer said their teachers help them reach their goals.

For students to set and reach their goals, they must not only work hard every day, but learn how to set and work toward their dreams for the future. Schools and teachers must do more to bridge this gap. For example, four out of five students said they want to go to

college, but how do educators—even at the elementary level—help them reach this goal? Helping students connect the present to the future, seeing the purpose in their current learning as a path toward their hopes and dreams, must come to the front and center of all educational ventures so all students can reach their fullest potential.

Conclusion

The *My Voice*© New Hampshire Grades 3-5 Report Academic Year 2007-2008 reveals generally positive findings. Young learners feel connected to their teachers, enjoy learning new things, work hard, and believe they can succeed. While we should take time to celebrate these findings, we must also reflect on the less positive data the survey reveals. For example, it is alarming to learn that approximately one out of ten students seem disconnected from school as early as the third grade. While third graders may not drop out of school physically, they may start on the path of dropping out mentally because they do not experience learning as engaging or relevant. In addition, while there are relatively few gender differences in the data, they begin to emerge as students move from third to fifth grade.

Educators must pay attention to the early warning signs so they can reach students before it is too late. Grades 3-5 are some of the most important years for students because they set the stage for the future; whether students are connected to school or not will only become more challenging the older they become. Fostering the 8 Conditions that support student learning and growth—*Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action*—can help counter these negative trends. As the survey findings reveal, these conditions are neither fully nor deeply integrated into the schools. If schools are to be places in which teaching and learning thrive, this must change. Listening to the voices of students is the first step.

As educators dedicated to positive reform in today's schools, it is our responsibility to explore in-depth the *My Voice*© data so we can fully understand and appreciate how students perceive their learning environments. In doing so, we will gain insight into students' fears, frustrations, hopes and dreams. Only then can we take the next steps toward our goal of improving teaching and learning environments so all schools promote students' self-worth, active engagement in the learning process, and a sense of purpose for all students.

My Voice® Student Aspirations Survey Questions & Grades 3-5 Results Academic Year 2007-2008

Condition	Survey Statement	Total Answering "Yes"
<i>Belonging</i>	I like my school.	71%
<i>Belonging</i>	I have friends I can be with at lunch	84%
<i>Belonging</i>	Other students like me.	75%
<i>Belonging</i>	I feel important in my classroom.	46%
<i>Belonging</i>	The principal knows my name.	72%
<i>Belonging</i>	Other students are kind to me.	52%
<i>Belonging</i>	I think bullying is a problem in my school.	49%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students respect teachers.	59%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students help each other out at my school.	54%
<i>Heroes</i>	If I am upset, I can tell my teacher why.	54%
<i>Heroes</i>	My teacher cares about me.	87%
<i>Heroes</i>	Teachers care if I am absent from school.	65%
<i>Heroes</i>	If I have a problem, I have an adult at school I can talk to.	70%
<i>Heroes</i>	Teachers respect students.	86%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students respect each other.	53%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	My teacher hangs up my work in the classroom or hallway.	40%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Teachers recognize me when I am kind and helpful.	64%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I help other people at my school.	70%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I give up when schoolwork is difficult.	5%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Teachers recognize me when I try my best.	66%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I give my best effort at school.	87%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Getting good grades is important to me.	93%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	I like going to school.	47%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	I learn things in many different ways.	79%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	School is boring.	12%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	I have fun at school.	55%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Teachers have fun at school.	55%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Learning can be fun.	54%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	I feel comfortable asking questions in class.	60%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	My teacher listens to my ideas.	66%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	I like what I learn at school.	53%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	My teacher knows what I like to do.	48%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	I like to learn new things in my classroom.	75%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	My teacher helps me learn from my mistakes.	82%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I only raise my hand if I am sure of the answer.	50%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I want to do well in school.	96%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	My teacher thinks I am smart.	76%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am excited to tell my friends when I get good grades.	53%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I can make choices in my classroom.	55%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I see myself as a leader.	34%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	Other students listen to my ideas.	31%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	My teachers let me be in charge of things.	16%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	It is important to follow rules.	95%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I am a good decision maker.	46%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I know how to set goals for myself.	74%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	My teacher helps me reach my goals.	69%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I think I am smart.	69%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I work hard in school.	89%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I want to go to college.	84%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My parents like my school	85%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My teacher tells my parents when I do well in school.	66%